

**PHIL 110: Ethics**  
Spring 2024, Section 1  
MWF 8:00-9:05am  
Goldspohn 20

Professor: Adam Kotsko, akotsko@noctrl.edu  
Office: 5 S. Loomis St., Office 17 (in attic)  
Office Hours: MWF, 1:15-3:00pm, or by appointment

**Course Description**

What is the right thing to do? We all ask ourselves that question every day. What makes ethics a philosophical pursuit, however, is that it goes beyond that initial question to ask *why*. What *makes* something the right thing to do? In this course, we will explore some of the most influential attempts to develop a systematic account of our ethical duties from the history of philosophy and weigh their insights and shortcomings. And along the way, each student will be required to make some small, but systematic effort to become a better person.

**Course Objectives**

Upon completing this course, students will be able to

- Analyze argumentative texts
- Write clearly and persuasively
- Understand and critically evaluate major ethical theories
- Apply ethical theories to real-life situations

This course also meets the objectives for the Cardinal Directions general education requirements in Humanities and Ethical Dimensions, for Community Engaged Learning, and meets the qualifications for the iCons Being Human and Engaging Civic Life.

**Required Course Readings**

Please buy, rather than rent, all course texts in hard copy, to facilitate underlining and note-taking. The additional cost will be rewarded with greater understanding and easier preparation for class discussion and exams.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Bartlett and Collins (U Chicago). ISBN: 9780226026756

Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Fretchman (Philosophical Library). ISBN: 9781480442801

*The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill*, ed. John Troyer (Hackett). ISBN: 9780872206496

Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard). ISBN: 9780674445444

Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Ellington (Hackett). ISBN: 9781107401068

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. Gruber, ed. Cooper (Hackett). ISBN: 9780872205543

Additional readings will be made available on Canvas or via handout.

## Student Assessment

Each student's grade will be determined as follows:

- Class participation: 20%
- Reading questions and quizzes: 20%
- Collaborative project: 10%
- Two tests: 15% each, 30% total
- Final exam: 20%

Grades will be represented in Canvas on a scale of 1000 points total, with each Canvas point being the equivalent to one-tenth of one percent of the final grade. My grading scale is as follows:

930-1000: A	780-799: C+
900-929: A-	730-779: C
880-899: B+	700-729: C-
830-879: B	600-699: D (Merlin allows no D+ or D-)
800-829: B-	599 or below: F

I reserve the right to round up, though such mercy is not to be considered guaranteed. I will never round down.

*Class participation* presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. Students should expect a mixture of lecture, small-group exercises, and whole-group discussion. The professor reserves the right to call on students at random at any time, with a preference for students who have not volunteered to speak recently.

The format of each class session will vary, and I recognize that in such a large class, it is not realistic that every individual will actively address the entire group every single class session, but every student should expect to participate actively in small groups, to contribute regularly to whole-group discussions, and to respond to the professor's questions most of the time when called on.

Participation grades will be posted on Canvas at intervals of two to three weeks. On average, each regular class session is worth 5 points, for a total of 200. Students who baseline expectations over a given grading period will receive a grade in the **B range** (4 points per session) for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range** (3 or fewer points per session). Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to keep small groups on task—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range** (5 points per session). Active participation in a smaller break-out group qualifies for a B-range grade, but you must regularly contribute to the whole-group discussion if you want an A for participation.

It is of course impossible to participate in class if you are not present. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Punctual attendance should be regarded as mandatory. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence.

Absences may be considered excused if the student supplies a valid excuse; examples of such excuses would include the following:

- You have suffered an illness or medical emergency that prevents attendance
- The death or illness of a family member requires you to be elsewhere during class time
- You are celebrating a religious holiday and have received approval for this before missing class
- You are representing the college in an official capacity and have made me aware of your responsibilities before missing class; these absence notifications and must be accompanied by a note or email from a relevant NCC employee (e.g., coach, faculty mentor, dean, etc.)

Students are responsible for notifying the professor absences as soon as possible, ideally beforehand.

Unexplained no-shows will result in the loss of participation points for that session, with no possibility of make-up. For a limited number of excused absences, the professor will award points equivalent to the student's average participation level, but if the number of excused absences become excessive, either across a short period or the semester as a whole, the professor reserves the right to require an individual meeting with the student to review missed material. Failure to attend such a meeting, which may be conducted via Zoom if needed, in a timely fashion will result in the loss of participation points even for excused absences. Nine or more absences, whether excused or not, will be considered grounds for automatic failure of the course, except in cases of extreme emergency or official accommodation.

Students requiring additional accommodations are urged to discuss this matter with the professor as early as possible in the semester and to devise a formal written plan in consultation with the relevant institutional offices. In line with the Shimer School (my home department)'s policies on attendance, accommodations will be made with the aim of allowing a student to attend at least 80% of class sessions and without placing undue burdens on either the accommodated student or the faculty member.

*Reading questions and quizzes* will provide the professor with additional evidence of your careful reading of the course materials. These will occur on a semi-improvised schedule. Reading questions will be posted on Canvas and announced via email shortly after the preceding class. Students may be required to answer a question from the reading, but more often they will be expected to upload photos of certain pages from the reading with their notes and underlining, or of their lecture notes. Responses will be due before class on the day for which the reading is assigned; I recommend checking for reading questions prior to doing the reading. Please note that reading questions cannot be submitted late, even if the student has an excused absence for that class.

Your *collaborative project* will track your progress in consciously cultivating an ethical virtue of your choice, together with an accountability group of other students. Grading will be based on your effort and serious reflection, not on your moral caliber as a person. A short paper will make up 7.5% of your grade and a group presentation will make up 2.5%. An assignment sheet providing more details will be passed out in class on the date listed below.

The *tests and final exams* will be made up of a mixture of short-answer and essay questions. All tests are open-book, but **only for students with print copies**—the use of laptops or other electronic devices during exam sessions will not be permitted (with the exception of students with disability accommodations). Note that this means you will need to **actually print out** PDF readings. The two tests will cover only a portion of the class content; the final exam will primarily focus on the segment of the class after the second test, but will also include a review element.

### Note on Institutional Policies

Please note that the college-wide policy on plagiarism holds for this class and that student assignments may be run through plagiarism-detection software at the professor’s discretion. Plagiarism is a very serious academic and ethical offence that can lead to failure of the assignment or course—or, after multiple instances, expulsion from college. Please consult the Student Handbook for more details of the plagiarism policy. Note that the professor considers the use of AI text-generation software a form of plagiarism.

### Class and Reading Schedule

*This calendar provides the schedule for assignments and readings for our time together this semester. Students should be aware that the schedule may change. All students will be alerted as soon as possible via email and Canvas announcement. **Failure to check email regularly is no excuse for missing these updates.** Readings from PDFs or handouts are marked as follows: (\*\*). All other readings are from the assigned course texts. Note that the assignment listed for each day is what you need to do **before** you come to class.*

Monday	January 8	Course intro and syllabus
Wednesday	January 10	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> (in <i>Trial and Death of Socrates</i> [TD])
Friday	January 12	Plato, <i>Apology</i> (in <i>TD</i> )
Monday	January 15	<b>MLK Day—NO CLASS</b>
Wednesday	January 17	Plato, <i>Crito</i> (in <i>TD</i> )
Friday	January 19	Plato, Selection from <i>Phaedo</i> (in <i>TD</i> ); “Allegory of the Cave” (**)
Monday	January 22	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , Book 1, ch. 1-5
Wednesday	January 24	Aristotle, Book 1, ch. 7-10
Friday	January 26	Aristotle, Book 1, ch. 12-13; Book 2, ch. 1-3
Monday	January 29	Aristotle, Book 2, ch. 4-9
Wednesday	January 31	Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 1-5
Friday	February 2	Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 6-9
		<b>Introduction of virtue project</b>

Monday	February 5	Aristotle, Book 3, ch. 10-12; Book 4, ch. 3
Wednesday	February 7	Aristotle, Book 5 (entire)
Friday	February 9	Aristotle, Book 6, chs. 5-13
Monday	February 12	Aristotle, Book 8, ch. 1-5
Wednesday	February 14	Aristotle, Book 10, ch. 6-9
Friday	February 16	Plato and Aristotle review day
Monday	February 19	<b>Test 1: Plato and Aristotle</b>
Wednesday	February 21	Kant, <i>Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , First Section
Friday	February 23	Kant, Second Section (pp. 19-27, up to “The question now arises...”)
Monday	February 26	Kant, Second Section (pp. 27-38, up to “In the previous formulations of imperatives...”)
Wednesday	February 28	Kant, Second Section (pp. pp. 38-48)
Friday	March 1	<b>Virtue Papers due; Virtue Presentations in-class</b>
Monday	March 4	Bentham, <i>Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> , chs. 1, 2, and 4 ( <i>Classical Utilitarians</i> [hereafter <i>CU</i> ], pp. 8-22)
Wednesday	March 6	Bentham, <i>Principles</i> , chs. 13-14 ( <i>CU</i> , pp. 26-38)
Friday	March 8	Bentham, “The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number” and “Push-Pin Versus Poetry”; Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , ch. 2, first half ( <i>CU</i> , pp. 92-94, 98-106, up to “And this leads...”)
Monday	March 11	<b>Spring Break—NO CLASS</b>
Wednesday	March 13	<b>Spring Break—NO CLASS</b>
Friday	March 15	<b>Spring Break—NO CLASS</b>
Monday	March 18	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , ch. 2, remainder ( <i>CU</i> , pp. 106-115)
Wednesday	March 20	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i> , chs. 3 and 4 ( <i>CU</i> , pp. 115-127)
Friday	March 22	Nozick, “The Experience Machine” (**) and Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (**)
Monday	March 25	Kant and Utilitarians Review Day
Wednesday	March 27	<b>Test 2: Kant and Utilitarians</b>
Friday	March 29	<b>Good Friday—NO CLASS</b>
Monday	April 1	Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion” (**)
Wednesday	April 3	Gilligan, <i>In a Different Voice</i> , Introduction, start ch. 2 (pp. 1-4 and 24-45, up to “Freud...”)
Friday	April 5	Gilligan, rest of ch. 2 (pp. 45-63)

Monday	April 8	Gilligan, start ch. 3 (pp. 64-85, up to “Although from one...”)
Wednesday	April 10	Gilligan, rest of ch. 3 (pp 85-105)
Friday	April 12	Gilligan, ch. 6 (pp. 151-174)
Monday	April 15	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> , first half of ch. 2 (pp. 37-58, up to “But this will to negation”)
Wednesday	April 17	Beauvoir, rest of ch. 2 (pp. 58-78)
Friday	April 19	Beauvoir, ch. 3, section 2 (pp. 84-103)
Monday	April 22	Beauvoir, ch. 3, section 3 (pp. 103-124)
Wednesday	April 24	Beauvoir, ch. 3, start section 5 (pp. 139-155, up to “One might first wonder...”)
Friday	April 26	Final review day
Monday	April 29	<b>FINAL EXAM: 8:00-10:00am</b>